

Water: Its Spiritual Significance



Rivers, ponds, lakes and streams. They have different names but all contain water. Religions have different names, but all contain truth.

Muhammad Ali, US boxer (1942 -)
Louisville, Kentucky



“Ohio” is the Iroquois word for “fine” or “good” river.



Water: Its Spiritual Significance

Edited by
Elena Lloyd-Sidle and Gray Henry-Blakemore



FONS VITAE

First published in 2009 by
Fons Vitae
49 Mockingbird Valley Drive
Louisville, KY 40207
<http://www.fonsvitae.com>
Email: fonsvitae@comcast.net

Copyright Fons Vitae 2009
Library of Congress Control Number: 2009934944
ISBN 9781891785412

No part of this book may be reproduced
in any form without prior permission of
the publishers. All rights reserved.

This book was typeset by Neville Blakemore, Jr.



I sailed up a river in a pleasant wind
New lands, new people, and new thoughts to find;
Many fair reaches and headlands appeared,
And many dangers were there to be feared;
But when I remember where I have been,
And the fair landscapes that I have seen,
THOU seemest the only permanent shore,
The cape never rounded, nor wandered o'er.

Thoreau's dedication in
A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers



Table of Contents

Dedication	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	xi
<i>Elena Lloyd-Sidle</i>	
The Symbolism of Water	1
<i>Titus Burckhardt</i>	
Sabbaths 2006 III. The Book of Camp Branch	7
<i>Wendell Berry</i>	
Sabbaths 2006 V.	12
<i>Wendell Berry</i>	
Sabbaths 2007 XIII.	13
<i>Wendell Berry</i>	
Wandering Thoughts on Rumi, Water, Music, Love, and Identity	15
<i>Coleman Barks</i>	
The Quranic Symbolism of Water	21
<i>Martin Lings</i>	
Sacred Waters: Thomas Merton's Thirst for Contemplation	31
<i>Jonathan Montaldo</i>	
Rain and the Rhinoceros (1965)	32
<i>Thomas Merton</i>	
Song	34
<i>Thomas Merton</i>	
In the Rain and the Sun	34
<i>Thomas Merton</i>	
The Others in the Kingdom	36
<i>Cecily Jones, Sister of Loretto</i>	
Wildflowers in the Dining Room	37
<i>Cecily Jones, Sister of Loretto</i>	
Rain Light	38
<i>W.S. Merwin</i>	
The Centrality of Water in the Hopi Tradition	39
<i>Alexander Price</i>	
Walk on Water	45
<i>Hamza Yusuf-Hanson</i>	
The Surface of the Waters	46
<i>Whitall N. Perry</i>	

The Feminine and Masculine Waters in the Teachings of the Baal Shem Tov <i>Translated and Annotated by Rabbi Dr. Menachem Kallus</i>	55
“Shells upon the Shore” <i>Henry David Thoreau</i>	64
The Role and Significance of Water in the Islamic Garden <i>Emma Clark</i>	67
Take Me To The River: The Koan of Kindness <i>Bonnie Myotai Treace, Sensei</i>	73
A Section of the Oconee Near Watkinsville <i>Coleman Barks</i>	78
As the Dew <i>Coleman Barks</i>	79
Sandpipers, Again <i>Lisa Starr</i>	80
For Mary Kane <i>Lisa Starr</i>	81
Water-Lines selections from Hafiz of Shiraz <i>Translated by John Slater and Jeffrey Einboden</i>	82
The Sea <i>Ananda K. Coomaraswamy</i>	83
A Glass of Water <i>Transmitted by Gray Henry</i>	89
The Flood in Hindu Tradition <i>Ananda K. Coomaraswamy</i>	90
Traversing the Waters and the Reciprocal Blessing <i>Timothy Scott</i>	98
On Contemplating the Commissioned Portrait of a British Viceroy of India, Carrying the Caption “Served with Distinction, 1910-1932” <i>Huston Smith</i>	107
On The Spiritual Significance of Tears by Martin Lings <i>Gray Henry</i>	108
Returning to The Primordial: The Water Symbolism of Baptism <i>Graeme Castleman</i>	110
Excerpts From The Gospel of Shrī Rāmakrishna <i>Shrī Rāmakrishna Paramahansa</i>	135
Water as Healer <i>Katherine Murray</i>	138

The Death Throes of the River Jordan <i>Christiana Z. Peppard</i>	140
Pure Water. Pure Life. <i>D.E. Adams</i>	147
Appendix: The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology <i>Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim</i>	151
A School Community Rises to the Challenge <i>Dexter Mahaffey</i>	158
Biographies of the Contributors	159



An ancient people tells us that when the moment of a great teacher's death was near, the disciples said, "What is it we will see when you are gone?" And the master said, "All I did was sit on the river bank handing out river water. After I'm gone I trust you will notice the water."

Recounted by Joan Chittister in
The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages,
New York: Crossroad, 1997, p. 137



Dedication

We dedicate this book to our friends who,
this summer, returned to their Maker,

Ewert Cousins, Thomas Berry and Carmen Blacker